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Upper Liard

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

FAMILY AND KIN

UPPER LIARD KASKA. While the nuclear or conjugal family certainly served important functions in the life of the aboriginal Kaska Indians, this unit was normally incorporated in a larger extended family that linked a woman and her daughters. Typically such an extended family included a man, his wife, perhaps her sisters and their husbands, married daughters and their husbands, unmarried sons, and the unmarried children of the married daughters. An extended family often constituted the microcosmic band, to which additional unrelated individuals of either sex attached themselves. In winter the band or extended family sometimes shared a large central house, although households containing two sisters and their families of procreation were also common. The distinction between nuclear family, extended family, and household is illustrated in Figure 6. Here the broken lines (enclosing individuals a, b, c, o, e, g, and i) delineate a household in which a, e, and i are members of one nuclear family and c, o, g, and i belong to another. In this diagram o, e, j, and g constitute another and adjacent household. While the children, j and g, would probably spend most of their time in their parent's dwelling they would be equally at home in the household of the married grandparents. Daughters tended to establish households quite soon after marriage, perhaps because of the strong avoidances governing the relations of a man and his mother-in-law. Not all microcosmic bands conformed to the matrilocal extended family here outlined. Sometimes a band formed around the nucleus of two brothers and their wives. Daughters on occasion also left their parents' band after marriage to take up residence with their husbands' kin. Bands tended to be fluid among most Athapaskan groups and few generalizations could be relied upon to characterize any particular type of organization. A man lacking skill in hunting might join with his wife's family, supporting the latter's brother or father to furnish a dependable source of meat. Should his reproductive prowess come to be reserved, friction might send him to rejoin his own parental group. If his skill or "luck" improved he would be able to fulfill the ideal expectations of a son-in-law or might decide to go off with his wife to shift for himself. Adoption, which was widely practiced, also complicated the composition of Indian groupings. Orphans as well as children whose parents still lived were adopted, the latter being somewhat better treated than parentless children. It is interesting to note that a parent who subsequently reared an adopted child received bad or other payment except in cases where the foster parents were guilty of mistreatment.

Following are relationship terms employed by the Upper Liard Indians:

[illegible]: my Mother, Father, Father (m.s.), Wife (m.s.), Mother (w.s.)
[illegible]: my Mother, Father, Father, Father (m.s.), Wife (m.s.), Mother (w.s.)
[illegible]: my Sis.
[illegible]: my Bro, Husb.
[illegible]: my Father.
[illegible]: my Mother, Bro.

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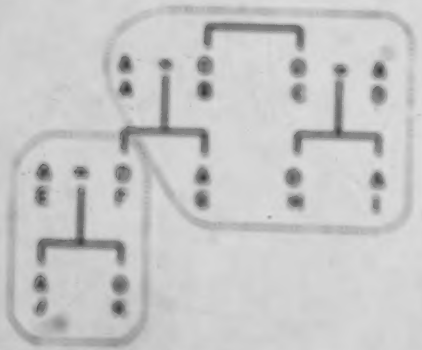
[illegible]

[illegible]



[illegible]

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[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

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Upper Liard

Two grandparent and four sibling terms (generally extended to parallel cousins) are found throughout the area. In general the kin terms are consistent with a system that includes matrilocal residence, matrilineal moieties, serial polygyny, sororate, and asymmetrical cross-cousin marriage with the MoBrDa or FaSiDa.[6]

SOCIAL UNITS LARGER THAN THE FAMILY

Two permanent social groupings larger than the family or kin group may be distinguished in the Canine, the band and the moiety. It is scarcely possible to discern fixed economic or social classes, the latter term referring here simply to a distinction between rich and poor families. The term "band" designates the microcosmic extended family group with its unrelated hangers-on or adopted children. Several such units occupying contiguous districts constituted the unorganized and highly amorphous macrocosmic band for which we have used the word "tribe."[7] Beyond speaking a similar dialect and intermarrying, the component units of a macrocosmic band experienced little feeling of solidarity. Vague shifting boundaries further reduced the integration of these groups. As already pointed out, relatively large aggregates of people remained in temporary association around a fish lake in summer and winter. Such transitory villages, however, probably did not usually include an entire macrocosmic band, although the patterns of living and playing together, like marriage, must have counteracted feuding and thus strengthened the integration of the people in a territory.

Upper Liard Kaska. Bordering the restricting valley of the upper Liard River lay the territory exploited by the extended-family bands of the Nisutlin/Agaiyaw. Little could be reached about these units except that on occasion, in winter and summer, many of them camped in one place (*nasanu'Tahana*, "lots of people stay together"). Each of the exogamous bands recognized a headman. As one informant said, "Before the arrival of the white men there were many bosses" (X). These leaders were primarily family heads so that, according to Chapple and Coon's system of analysis, true (i.e., hereditarily) political organization remained only incipiently realized in aboriginal Kaska society.[8] The headman's ability as a hunter, a quality also witnessed people to join his band, also helped him to accumulate wealth. When need required, his food resources were freely distributed among the band members. A leader held authority as long as he lived. Upon death a son succeeded to the position of family chief. Should the youth be a poor or indifferent hunter, any other man in the band might be called upon to assume leadership. The death of a headman probably caused a redistribution of the band's personnel around one or more new leaders. Leaders who lost competence found themselves ignored, the people adhering to a more intelligent man. The headman's functions transcended mere food getting. His wisdom derived from experience, and the ability to speak convincingly reinforced his authority in moral matters. When food resources ran low the

[6] See below, pp. 121, 129.

[7] This terminology was first employed to describe the social organization of the Fort Nelson Slave. Honigmann, *Ethnography and Acculturation of the Fort Nelson Slave* (1946), 46-48.

[8] These writers have defined non-political authority as arising when one individual or group originates orders or persons other than his own. Chapple and Coon, *Principles of Anthropology* (1942), 509.

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Upper Liard

headman encouraged men to hunt. He urged his followers to maintain peaceful relations and reprimanded the lazy, with good reason for a chronically non-productive man represented a drain on the capacity of others.[5] The chief did not often try to punish adult members of his band but could expel a person for certain crimes. Any man might express disagreement with the headman although he would be urged to "watch" his words. The informant appeared to recognize the description of a council and described such meetings at which discussion centered on important hunting plans or on an outbreak of in-group aggression. Men and women attended such deliberations but women never tried to speak.

The dwellers on the upper Liard River were divided into two exogamous matrilineal moieties, the Wolf and Crow. Slightly greater prestige appears to have attached to the Wolf section. According to one old man (X), who had come to the Cassiar as a boy from Espatotena country, the Kaska lacked moiety division prior to the time when Tahltan Indians penetrated the area. When the latter encountered a Kaska Indian they said, "You're a Wolf" or "You're a Crow," thus classifying the population. At first the Kaska did not understand such talk. Eventually they adopted the dual division of the Tahltan.[6] A myth gives a more exotic account of the origin of moiety organization. The tale has been reported for the Pelly River Tutchone by Poole Field and was known to our chief informant (O). The man previously referred to (X), who came from the east, did not know the account. Following is the unedited version of the tale taken from Field's manuscript.[7]

The animals were the first people and the smartest of all the animals, and the wisest were the wolves and ravens, the next was the wolverine. All the animals could talk and understand each other and can yet. The wolves and ravens intermarried and their children were Indians. They called the wolverine their brother-in-law and were very friendly with him.

The wolves and ravens held a meeting and made a law that they would not marry any other animal, but a wolf was to marry a raven and a raven a wolf. The children would take their name from the mother, and their mother would own the country. Sisters and brothers, after they became of age, should not speak or play with each other; when a wolf died the other wolves should make a big feast for the ravens to eat and would find the raven peasants but would eat nothing themselves. When a raven died he was to do the same for the wolves and so the world was started.

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[5] Hallowell's figures, which show that in hunting bands one male hunter supports about three persons including himself, appear to be borne out when other groups are examined. Hallowell, *Size of Algonkian Hunting Territories: Function of Ecological Adjustment* (1949); Honigmann, *Intercultural Relations at Great Whale River, P. Q.* (1952), 160.

[6] The question of the relationship of dual organization among the Kaska to the social organization of the Tlingit has still to be settled. Although social organization was more completely developed on the Northwest Coast, the basic features of moiety organization is similar between the two regions. Tlingit moieties, which were matrilineal and exogamous, are designated Raven (sometimes Eagle) and Wolf. The Kaska fire origin myth given above (see p. 61) suggests that certain animals were somehow closely "related." Thus the wolverine, fox, and black bear "belonged" to the crow; the grizzly bear and lynx were allied to the wolf. Swanton's evidence suggests a similar identification of grizzly bear with wolf among the Tlingit while Krause includes the (black?) bear here too. See Swanton, *Social Condition, Beliefs and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians* (1908), 398, 413-417, 423-425; Krause, *Tlinkit Indianer* (1885), 113, 122; Jones, *Study of the Tsimshian of Alaska* (1914), 35, 44, 170-171.

[7] Field, *Unpublished manuscript* (1913), 89-91.